

As was already mentioned, I am a product of the Vietnam war; and the veterans who were getting out there, a lot of people were afraid to hire them. They didn't know whether they would be recalled back into the service, and they didn't know whether they had post-traumatic stress disorder. They were not going to take a chance on them, and that was sad. That was many, many years ago, but the stats don't lie.

I am very, very supportive. I get passionate about these programs because the bottom line is we have to make sure that we take care of the troops, and this is a bill that, with the cooperation of private industry, has those incentives built in there. I am optimistic. We had bipartisan support the last time. We went all the way up there and were waiting the last time for the Senate—holding our breath. Everybody knows you don't always get what you want. I am not going to give up and neither will the people who have been supporting this bill because we are all very, very passionate about veterans.

I thank Chairman ROE. I thank Ranking Member WALZ for his great support and military service. I thank Representative TULSI GABBARD for, once again, being the original cosponsor of this important legislation and for always being there for the veterans and the military. I also thank Congressman BILIRAKIS for his great support.

Once again, this passed out of the House last November and had unanimous support. I urge my colleagues to once again vote in favor of this bill.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Hawaii (Ms. GABBARD), who still serves this Nation in uniform.

Ms. GABBARD. Mr. Speaker, I stand in strong support of H.R. 244, the HIRE Vets Act, which I am so proud and honored to have worked on with my colleague and fellow veteran, Colonel PAUL COOK from California.

This is personal for us. This is about our brothers and sisters in uniform—from different generations—who have been honored and thanked for their service in uniform but who, unfortunately, are often forgotten about when they lay that uniform down. Most people aren't aware that every single day roughly 500 veterans are transitioning from military life to civilian life, joining more than 2.9 million veterans who have returned home since 9/11 alone. Through their service and training, these are men and women who are highly trained, who have experience in leading, in making decisions under pressure, in acting and working well as members of a team, and in accomplishing the mission.

Data show that veterans are civic assets in our communities. They have higher rates of voting, of engaging with local governments and community organizations, of participating actively in community service, and more. To-

gether, these qualities make our veterans especially valuable to employers, whether it be in the private sector, in the public sector, or in the nonprofit sector.

Unfortunately, for them, returning to a civilian job market is not as easy as it should be. They often face an unfriendly job market or even an unfriendly culture that doesn't fully understand them and what they bring to the table. Many people don't understand that our veterans are not seeking pity or a handout but are simply looking for an opportunity to continue to serve—to continue to contribute to our communities and to our country.

This legislation is focused on encouraging employers to hire more veterans. We have seen different programs and initiatives in my home State of Hawaii and in States across the country that focus on recruiting and retaining veterans, but the fact is that there are still more than 400,000 unemployed veterans across the country. We need to do more.

This legislation, the HIRE Vets Act, gets directly at this need by setting up an incentive system to encourage employers to hire and retain veterans. It creates a standard of recognition for employers who go the extra mile to recruit and retain veterans and provide services that support our veteran community.

We came together at the end of last year and passed this legislation unanimously. I am hopeful that my colleagues will once again stand and pass this important legislation and move it along through the Senate and to the President's desk for his signature.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers. I encourage my colleagues to support H.R. 244, as amended.

I yield back the balance of my time. Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I urge all Members to support this legislation.

I yield back the balance of my time. The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 244, as amended. The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

BOOSTING RATES OF AMERICAN VETERAN EMPLOYMENT ACT

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 974) to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in awarding a contract for the procurement of goods or services, to give a preference to offerors that employ veterans.

The Clerk read the title of the bill. The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 974

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Boosting Rates of American Veteran Employment Act" or the "BRAVE Act".

SEC. 2. PREFERENCE FOR OFFERORS EMPLOYING VETERANS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 81 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding after section 8128 the following new section:

"§ 8129. Preference for offerors employing veterans

"(a) PREFERENCE.—In awarding a contract for the procurement of goods or services, the Secretary may give a preference to offerors that employ veterans on a full-time basis. The Secretary shall determine such preference based on the percentage of the full-time employees of the offeror who are veterans.

"(b) ENFORCEMENT PENALTIES FOR MISREPRESENTATION.—(1) Any offeror that is determined by the Secretary to have willfully and intentionally misrepresented the veteran status of the employees of the offeror for purposes of subsection (a) may be debarred from contracting with the Department for a period of not less than five years.

"(2) If the Secretary carries out a debarment under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall commence debarment action against the offeror by not later than 30 days after determining that the offeror willfully and intentionally misrepresented the veteran status of the employees of the offeror as described in paragraph (1) and shall complete debarment actions against such offeror by not later than 90 days after such determination.

"(3) The debarment of an offeror under paragraph (1) includes the debarment of all principals in the offeror for a period of not less than five years."

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting after the item relating to section 8128 the following new item:

"8129. Preference for offerors employing veterans."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. WALZ) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida.

□ 1715

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BILIRAKIS. I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, to improve employment opportunities for veterans and business opportunities for the companies that employ them, H.R. 974 would authorize the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs to consider how many veterans an offeror employs during a

decision to award a contract. Under this bill, the Secretary may give a preference to such employers based on the percentage of the workforce made up of veterans. It makes sense.

The bill would also allow the Secretary to debar any offeror who willfully and intentionally misrepresents the number of veterans they employ. I am glad that provision is in there.

Mr. Speaker, the unemployment rate among certain age groups of veterans still exceeds their nonveteran peers, and this legislation is one commonsense step to incentivize employers to bring veterans into their workforce and increase job opportunities for veterans of all ages.

I firmly believe that we should do all we can to encourage both small and large businesses to provide job opportunities for veterans as well as provide the Secretary the authority to consider such hires when making contracting decisions. This will further incentivize government contractors to make a positive investment in their companies by making investments in our Nation's veterans.

I thank Miss RICE for her hard work on this bill, and it has my full support.

I urge all of my colleagues to support H.R. 974.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise in support of H.R. 947, the Boosting Rates of American Veteran Employment Act, or BRAVE Act.

I thank the vice chairman for his kind words on this bill, and I especially would like to thank the gentlewoman from New York (Miss RICE), an unwavering advocate of our veterans and author of this smart piece of legislation.

Both parties agree it is unacceptable that men and women returning home from our most recent conflicts don't have good, reliable jobs waiting for them. We can start right here in the Federal Government. The VA establishes long-term contracts with private companies for medical equipment, construction, supplies, services, and more.

Currently, the VA gives preferences to veteran-owned small businesses. That is great. What this piece of legislation does is expand this contracting preference to allow the VA Secretary to give a preference to companies that actively search out and employ veterans, a policy that would incentivize companies to even hire more veterans. This is already a smart approach for those companies because veterans bring to a job the skills they have learned over the years and make the company even stronger.

This bipartisan piece of legislation adds no cost to the taxpayers. It allows for debarment of any company that knowingly misrepresents its portion of veteran employees in order to receive the contracting preference.

The BRAVE Act represents a win-win for the private sector, the Federal Government, and, most importantly, for our veterans.

Again, I would like to thank the gentlewoman from New York (Miss RICE), who will tell us a little more about this in a few moments, and Chairman ROE of Tennessee and Vice Chairman BILIRAKIS for continuing to bring good pieces of veterans legislation to the floor. We are grateful for that.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield 5 minutes to the gentlewoman from New York (Miss RICE), the author, the lead sponsor of this piece of legislation, a member of the Veterans' Affairs Committee since coming to Congress, and a fierce advocate for those warriors.

Miss RICE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 974, the Boosting Rates of American Veteran Employment Act, which I introduced along with Congressman and Colonel PAUL COOK of California.

The BRAVE Act is commonsense, bipartisan legislation that will authorize the VA Secretary, when awarding Federal contracts, to give preference to contractors with high concentrations of full-time veteran employees. This bill will cost taxpayers absolutely nothing.

It will, first, reward companies that actively hire and invest in our veterans, companies that seek out veterans and give them opportunities to bring their unique skills, training, and experience to the civilian workforce.

Second, it will create an incentive for other companies to do the same and bring more veterans into their workforce.

Most importantly, as more and more companies hire more and more veterans, they will ultimately see that investing in veterans is good for business. That is the real incentive here. It is not just an advantage in securing Federal contracts; it is getting the benefit of employees who have worn the uniform, who have been trained by the greatest military in the world, and who have learned to get the job done, no matter what that job is.

We need more businesses in the private sector to recognize the value of investing in the men and women who have served our country. It is not an act of charity. Veterans are not looking for a handout; they just need an opportunity. The BRAVE Act will help ensure that more veterans have those opportunities.

I want to thank Chairman ROE of Tennessee, Vice Chairman BILIRAKIS, and Ranking Member WALZ for supporting this bill and for helping to bring it to the floor today.

This legislation passed unanimously in the last Congress, and I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to, once again, give it the bipartisan support it deserves.

Mr. WALZ. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers on my side.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 974.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, once again, I encourage all Members to support this legislation. I commend Representative RICE for her good work.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 974.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the yeas have it.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

APPOINTMENT OF INDIVIDUALS TO UNITED STATES-CHINA ECONOMIC AND SECURITY REVIEW COMMISSION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair announces the Speaker's appointment, pursuant to section 1238(b)(3) of the Floyd D. Spence National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2001 (22 U.S.C. 7002), as amended, and the order of the House of January 3, 2017, of the following individuals on the part of the House to the United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission for a term expiring on December 31, 2018:

Mr. Larry Wortzel, Williamsburg, Virginia

Mr. Robert Glenn Hubbard, New York, New York

APPOINTMENT OF INDIVIDUALS TO THE CREATING OPTIONS FOR VETERANS' EXPEDITED RECOVERY COMMISSION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair announces the Speaker's appointment, pursuant to section 931(c) of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2016 (Pub. L. 114-198), and the order of the House of January 3, 2017, of the following individuals on the part of the House to the Creating Options for Veterans' Expedited Recovery Commission:

Captain John M. Rose, U.S. Navy, Retired, Kenosha, Wisconsin

Lieutenant Colonel Jamil S. Khan, U.S. Marine Corps, Retired, Janesville, Wisconsin

APPOINTMENT OF INDIVIDUAL TO THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON MILITARY, NATIONAL, AND PUBLIC SERVICE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair announces the Speaker's appointment, pursuant to section 553(b) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 (Pub. L. 114-328), and the order of the House of January 3, 2017, of the following individual